

Child Observation No. 7

Time & Event Sampling

User notes





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Aims of the film and its use

A main problem of all observation is in extracting relevant information from a mass of complex activity. As well as learning observation skills it is also important to be able to identify which type of observation is required. In this tape you are shown two types of observation: time sampling and event sampling.

Time sampling

Time sampling is often used where there is a concern about an aspect of behaviour. It involves observing a child for an extended period such as a whole morning/afternoon session, or even a whole day. A record lasting for a predetermined length of time (e.g. 30 seconds or 1 minute) is made at regular intervals (e.g. every 10 minutes or every hour) about what a particular child (or group of children) is doing. It is a useful technique for:

- ◆ Observing a child's total behaviour and to find out what a child does typically during the course of a day.
- ◆ Focusing on a selected aspect of behaviour to reveal the frequency of that behaviour.
- ◆ Focusing on an activity involving a group of children using a particular resource e.g. the book or home corner, to evaluate the appropriateness of the provision.

Disadvantages of this technique are in being tied to clock watching and being restricted to only recording events that happen in the predetermined period. However, if appropriate it will give an objective record of behaviour and will show if concerns need intervention.

Before starting any observation you must ensure that you have clear aims. Without an aim and focus no useful conclusion can be drawn.

Event sampling

In contrast to time sampling that selects information from a stream of events, event sampling concentrates on a particular short period of behaviour – the event you are interested in that occurs at intervals. The length of the observation cannot be predetermined as it is dependent on the length of the event.

It is frequently used, for example, to observe:

- ◆ Aggressive behaviour
- ◆ Quarrels



- ◆ Attention seeking
- ◆ Bouts of crying or comfort seeking

Before starting a full observation you will already have observed and formed possible concerns. With any observation a clearly defined aim will need to be identified so that you know exactly what you want to record.

The disadvantages are the difficulties of being constantly alert and ready to record the event. However it does give a very closely focussed view and allows that whole event and possibly its build up to be recorded.

About the video sequences to use for observations

We chose two quite different children to observe and filmed them individually for one afternoon session at their nursery. They had both been attending the nursery every afternoon for one month. Most of the children in the class had settled in well. After consultation with the staff it was decided to film a very quiet girl and a lively boy who often seemed to be involved in disruptions. Most of the sessions involved free play and the children were able to wander about among the various activities staying with them as long as they liked, playing with who ever they chose.

For both children a time sample and an event sample were filmed. The purpose of this was twofold; to provide examples of both techniques and also to compare the information that was gathered from the two methods.

Using the video with students

Firstly you can talk about the aims of the observations. Then you may wish to look at the sequences one clip at a time, perhaps repeating the clip to allow students more time to observe properly what is happening. The clips are numbered in the top left of the picture to make it easier to find the right bit if you rewind, and to link it with the observation in these notes.

The dvd can be paused between clips to allow students either to write down their own observations, or to look at the observations we have made in these notes. You may photocopy these notes for students to use. There are also blank observation forms for students.

After viewing a complete sequence of video clips you can ask students to:

- ◆ Interpret the observations and/or discuss what they have learned from the observations.
- ◆ Consider whether the observations meet the aims set out at the start of the sequence.
- ◆ Discuss how appropriate the particular observation method was.
- ◆ Discuss other situations where the particular observation method could be useful.



The video sequences

Our observations

Sequence 1 – Laura – Time Sample

Background to observation

Laura is a 3 years 9 months girl who has been attending the nursery in the afternoons for 4 weeks. The staff were concerned because she didn't speak or answer them when they tried to talk to her and she also seemed to be very withdrawn not seeming to socialise with the other children. Staff had even begun to wonder if she was deaf. The sessions are mainly free play and the children are free to choose from the available activities. There are 20 children and 2 staff.

Aim

To see how Laura spends her time and see if she speaks or socialises with the other children and/or staff.

Method

Laura was observed every 10 minutes for 30 seconds over a 2 hour period.

Abbreviations: *T* = teacher, *L* = Laura

No.	Time & setting	Others present	Actions & reactions	Language
1	1.10 pm Classroom in circle	Teacher and half of class	General chatter as T talks to group. L sitting cross-legged watching what's going on.	None
2	1.20 pm Home corner	Alone	L stands behind counter watching into main classroom doing nothing.	None
3	1.30 pm Home corner	One girl	Girl speaks to L. L makes eye contact then looks away and watches others. Then she turns back and smiles submissively (mouth corners not turned up)	None



4	1.40 pm Home corner	Alone	L stands behind counter picking up items under the counter and watching others pass.	None
5	1.50 pm Home corner	One girl.	L stands behind counter and watches other girl standing next to her ironing.	None
6	2.00 pm Home corner	Two children.	L stands by counter holding the iron. A girl approaches her and takes the iron off her and then returns it. L submissively allows this and stands watching the same girl as she plays with a doll.	None
7	2.10 pm Home corner	Small group	L stands behind counter watching the other children playing and interacting around her.	None
8	2.20 pm Home corner	Small group	L sits at the table watching the other children playing.	None
9	2.30 pm Home corner	Teacher and small group	L picking up toys. T giving instructions to L and others. L looks up at T and picks up more toys.	None
10	2.40 pm Playground with outside equipment	Teacher and nursery nurse and whole class of children.	Sits on rocker alone watching others.	None
11	2.50 pm Playground	Whole class	About to climb slide when another girl pushes her back and goes first. L stands back and watches as others go in front.	None
12	3.00 pm Playground	Whole class	Stoops at climbing frame watching as children play inside. Turns to look at T who smiles at her.	None

Laura - Time Sample Interpretation

Laura spent almost all the free play period in the home corner, mostly on her own behind a counter in an isolating position. Nearly all the time she is watching the other children



playing but she doesn't become absorbed in play either with others or on her own. When she is approached by other children she makes eye contact but doesn't speak and behaves very submissively e.g. allowing a toy to be taken from her without protest. She does smile and seem to be interested in the other children's interactions. Throughout the observation Laura does not speak.

Laura - Time Sample Conclusion

The observation revealed a girl who doesn't speak to children or adults and seems rather isolated. The time sample observation is inconclusive about whether Laura does speak at all. Clearly it is possible that she did speak and/or socialised more outside the time sample periods. It is also possible that she speaks at home but not at nursery. An event sample is likely to tell us more about Laura's socialising at nursery.



Sequence 2 – Laura – Event Sample

Background to observation

Laura is a 3 years 9 months girl who has been attending the nursery in the afternoons for 4 weeks. The staff were concerned because she didn't speak or answer them when they tried to talk to her and she also seemed to be very withdrawn not seeming to socialise with the other children. Staff had even begun to wonder if she was deaf. The sessions are mainly free play and the children are free to choose from the available activities. There are 20 children and 2 staff.

Aim

To see if Laura speaks or socialises with adults or children and if so how.

Method

Every interaction where Laura was spoken to, or spoke herself, was recorded.

Abbreviations: *T* = teacher, *L* = Laura, *C* = Child

No.	Time	Antecedent	Interaction	Non Verbal Communication	Speech	Concequence
1	1.16 pm	Sitting in circle with other children and teacher (T).	T asks L what she wants to play with.	L looks away and then makes eye contact. She doesn't respond to T's speech and wrings hands.	None.	T suggests another child take L to the playroom and L leaves with the other child.
2	1.22 pm	L alone in house corner behind counter with phones.	C approaches and asks a question.	L nods, smiles and makes eye contact.	None.	Child turns and plays with another C.
3	1.30 pm	L in house corner behind counter. Another C in front phoning.	C talks about and phones her dad.	L makes eye contact and smiles. L copies and picks up another phone.	None. Says "hiya" on phone.	C leaves.
4	1.41 pm	L in house corner alone.	C approaches and offers L a phone saying "here's your mam".	L accepts phone and puts it to her ear. She shrugs shoulders.	None. Says "hiya" on phone.	C leaves.



5	1.58 pm	L alone in house corner ironing.	C approaches and talks to L about ironing, wanting to play.	L makes brief eye contact.	None.	C turns away to play with others.
6	2.05 pm	L in house corner - stands by ironing board watching two other children.	Other children are looking for a cup. L tells them where the cup is.	L listens and watches and points to where the cup is.	"There's a cup there - over there".	The C still can't find cup and although L makes one intervention, she doesn't include herself further in the game and stays standing alone.
7	2.07 pm	L in home corner standing by counter as two C approach her.	C offers L a bowl as a kettle.	L makes brief eye contact but doesn't accept.	None.	C leaves and L watches them wringing her hands.
8	2.12 pm	L in home corner sitting at table watching. Another C also sits at table.	C talks to L "Are you having a nice day?" Another C approaches and gives them both dinner to eat.	L makes eye contact and smiles. L nods and speaks to the first child.	None. "That's yours".	L begins to enter into game.
9	2.17 pm	L in home corner sitting alone at table.	C comes to sit at table with her and starts talking. Another C gives her more dinner.	Makes eye contact and smiles.	None.	L left alone. Pretends to eat food.
10	2.22 pm	L in home corner sitting at table watching. Other C and T present for clearing up time.	T asks L to put the dolls to bed.	L responds immediately.	None.	Sits back at table as soon as task completed.
11	2.28 pm	L in home corner sitting at table watching. Other children and T still clearing up.	T asks L if she can find another basket. T asks L if she's found the basket.	L makes eye contact and nods. Goes and gets dolls clothes. L makes eye contact and goes to get correct item, returns with it makes eye contact and smiles.	None.	Carries on tidying up on own initiative.



12	2.30 pm	L in home corner helping clear way with other C and T.	T asks L for more help with dolls and putting away, trying to get L to talk.	L makes eye contact and smiles and nods in response. Willingly helps, following T's instructions and pointing when asked where she wants something put.	None.	Continues to help tidying up.
13	2.32 pm	L going into corridor to put item away. Another C is taking off apron.	C asks L for help with taking off apron. L immediately helps.		None.	Runs back to home corner and T.
14	2.33 pm	L in home corner with T.	T asks L "are we nearly tidy now Laura?" L switches lights off when asked.	L nods, making eye contact and smiles.	None.	Looks pleased with herself as she and T finally leave home corner.
15	2.42 pm	L in playground.	Sits on rocker. A boy gets on and L gets off and rocks him. He says he wants to get off.	L responds immediately and lets him off.	None.	Left alone L gets back into rocker.

Laura - Event Sample Interpretation

Although Laura takes herself to an isolating position behind the counter in the home corner, there are lots of occasions when others approach her giving her opportunities to socialise. When the teacher asks Laura what she wants to play with she wrings her hands indicating that she feels very agitated and nervous. However in all cases Laura makes eye contact and often smiles giving the impression that she does want to socialise.

When other children do approach Laura she doesn't extend any of the contacts of her own initiative and this results in the other children leaving her quickly to find more receptive playmates. Laura often copies what the other children do in their playing, tending to indicate 'I want to do this with you' (e.g. ironing and phoning). But this doesn't work as a way of encouraging others to stay and play because she leaves it too late – the potential playmates have already moved on.

Laura does talk. Several times she speaks into the telephone. She also offers others infor-



mation when she thinks she has something useful to offer. "There's the cup, over there" shows she can speak clearly and hear and understand what's going on very well. Towards the end of the free play session she ventures out from behind the counter and begins to enter into the make believe game of serving dinners. She doesn't speak in the presence of the teacher even when encouraged, although she appears keen to please. She complies with all requests made of her by adults and children.

Laura - Event Sample Conclusion

The observation reveals a girl who gives all the signs of wanting to interact with other children. There are no indications of any hearing defect – in fact quite the contrary. She doesn't show any real signs of distress and future observations by teachers could check that Laura does gradually gain in confidence and doesn't remain or increase in isolation.

Comparison of the two observations

The time sample did show how Laura typically spent her time. It also gave us some information about her social behaviour but we still couldn't say whether Laura talked to people or not. The event sample on the other hand didn't give us a picture of the way Laura spent so much of her time on her own in an isolating position but it did tell us a lot about the range of her socialising and confirmed that she could talk well and hear what was going on.



Sequence 3 – David – Time Sample

Background to observation

David is a 3 years 4 months boy who has been attending the nursery in the afternoons for 4 weeks. The staff were mildly concerned that he often seems to be at the centre of disruptions and they had felt that they had to keep a constant ear open for him, often meaning breaking off what they were doing with other children. They were interested to find out what he spent his time doing, what was the cause of the disruptions, and whether David was provoked or was exhibiting aggressive behaviour himself. The sessions are mainly free play and the children are free to choose from the available activities. There are 20 children and 2 staff.

Aim

To see how David spends his time and if he is frequently involved in disruptions.

Method

David was observed every 10 minutes for 30 seconds over a 2 hour period.

abbreviations: *T = Teacher, D = David*

No.	Time & setting	Others present	Actions & reactions	Language
1	1.10 pm Classroom in circle	Half of class	D chews his book.	None
2	1.20 pm Water trough	Small group	D is pouring water into a jug. T asks D what he wants her to do and he says he wants his jug filling with her water. He holds it steady and as the jug gets heavy he laughs, dropping the jug.	D answers T "Put in there"
3	1.30 pm Toilet	No-one	D goes to toilet (watched by T) and at the sink concentrates on washing paint off his arms.	None
4	1.40 pm Painting table	Small group	D sitting painting. Counts children at table and then hears T telling a child to put name on painting. D wants his name on and gets very assertive about it.	D counts "134567" then "put my name on" repeats insistently.



5	1.50 pm Painting table	Small group and T	D absorbed in painting a picture. T sitting talking to him and group. He concentrates on picture in a single minded way.	D says "look" and smiles as he shows T his painting.
6	2.00 pm Playdough table	One boy	Playing alongside other boy sometimes watching what he does - becoming totally absorbed in his dough.	None
7	2.10 pm Trainset area	Small group	D absorbed in playing with trains. Starts taking up more track with- out seeming to realise that others are playing with it. Boy reacts by pushing him and shouting "no". D just responds with a lesser push and continues pulling up the track.	None
8	2.20 pm Corridor - tidy up time	Small group and T	D is trying to respond to teacher's request to put clothing away and boy intervenes snatching it off him. Tug of war ensues and other boy told off.	None
9	2.30 pm Water trough - tidy up time	Small group and T	D examines truck and goes to water and begins playing. It is tidy up time and T has to be quite force- ful to get him to comply as he is becoming absorbed in new game.	None
10	2.40 pm Home corner tidy up time.	Small group and T	D trying to put cover on dolls - absorbed, trying to get it right.	None
11	2.50 pm Sitting on floor for story-time.	T and whole class	T is reading story about naughty babies and D is listening absorbed.	Answers "no" and "yes" to T's questions.
12	3.00 pm Empty classroom.	One boy	Interaction with boy who is hold- ing up a sheet of mirrors. D laughs. Boy hits him on head and D reacts with less force than is shown to him. D rips paper, and both run off laughing.	None



13	3.10 pm Playground at climbing frame.		Runs and laughs from slide ladder. Pushes another boy in front of him at the ladder and climbs in front of him.	None
14	3.20 pm Classroom - home time.	Class and parents	Chews sock. Runs to daddy and hugs and gives him a paper and a sock and cuddles little brother.	"Daddy!"

David - Time Sample Interpretation

David spends his time at a variety of activities and concentrates well getting absorbed in the activities. He seems to be very single minded and determined to do what he wants. He plays alongside other children but isn't seen to play with them and he doesn't talk to any of the children in any of the sessions. He does talk to the teacher when necessary. He doesn't cooperate with others particularly. There is only one session which involves a disruption and this is instigated by David and is a result of him taking exactly what he wants without referring to what others are doing. He isn't seen to be aggressive even when his single mindedness annoys others and he gets hit by them. He is very assertive and stands his own ground without becoming physically aggressive.

David - Time Sample Conclusion

David has good powers of concentration, becoming absorbed in whatever he is doing. He is single-minded, to the extent of taking what he wants without reference to others, possibly resulting in conflict situations, but his involvement in disruptions does not seem to be frequent. An event sample may provide more evidence of both these points.



Sequence 4 – David – Event sample

Background to observation

David is a 3 years 4 months boy who has been attending the nursery in the afternoons for 4 weeks. The staff were mildly concerned that he often seems to be at the centre of disruptions and they had felt that they had to keep a constant ear open for him, often meaning breaking off what they were doing with other children. They were interested to find out what he spent his time doing, what was the cause of the disruptions, and whether David was provoked or was exhibiting aggressive behaviour himself. The sessions are mainly free play and the children are free to choose from the available activities. There are 20 children and 2 staff.

Aim

To see the nature of David's involvement in disruptions.

Method

Observe all interaction where David is involved in disruptions.

abbreviations: T = teacher, D = David, G = Girl, B - Boy

No.	Time	Others Present	Description of incident	Teacher Involvement	Provoked
1	1.18 pm	Small group round water table	D and G spitting water from the water containers	T intervenes and ignores incident and spends time directing D to different behaviour	No
2	2.13 pm	Two girls in toilets	D intimidates a G by standing very close for no apparent reason	T notices and asks what's happening and directs D's hand drying.	No
3	1.30 pm	Two children at paint table.	G dabs paint on D's new paper. He runs round table, takes her paint pot and laughs. She shouts for teacher.	T comes and directs redistributing the paint.	Yes
4	2.10 pm	Two children playing with train-set.	D playing next to others and suddenly turns to grab train track causing other B to complain and push D. D holds boy out of way determined to take the track he wants.	None.	No



5	2.17 pm	One boy in corridor.	D is making noises and involves another B who he falls over.	None.	No.
6	2.25 pm	Four children tidying up round water table.	One girl tells D it's tidy up time and he responds by pouring water on her head twice. A bit of a battle ensues and she goes to tell T.	T comes and explains why it wasn't a good thing to do and asks him to apologise, which he does and says "sorry".	No.
7	3.12 pm	Two girls playing with bricks in playground.	D comes down from climbing frame and interrupts two Gs playing with bricks. One girl leaves immediately, saying "no!". D continues taking the other girls bricks - "I want all" but she tells him he's not allowed to take all of them. D says "I can" and carries on.	None.	No.
8	3.15 pm	Two children with bricks in playground.	B comes to join D. D shows no awareness of boy and hurls a block hitting the B accidentally. D carries on playing with bricks regardless as the boy runs away crying loudly.	T consoles boy (in background).	No.
9	3.18 pm	Group in circle on floor.	B sitting next to D gets up to hit the B opposite. D encourages him by laughing and making eye contact and then gets up and does the same himself. Chews a piece of paper.	None.	No.

David - Event Sample Interpretation

We noted 9 incidents in total. In 6 of them the teacher was summoned by another child, or the teacher noticed the disturbance and came to see what was happening. In most



of the cases the disturbance was instigated by David. In half of the incidents he seems to be in high spirits and laughing and the disruption was the result of over excitement rather than deliberate antisocial behaviour. However he takes no notice of other children's objections to his behaviour.

The other incidents seem to be the result of David being totally unaware and unconcerned about his effect on others. He barges in, interrupts and spoils others' games by taking their equipment and takes no notice at all of their objections, being determined to proceed with his own plans. He is not seen to be aggressive and when others react physically to his behaviour he only responds with lesser force. He is totally unconcerned when he hurts another child and carries on with his own game.

David - Time Sample Conclusion

David needs to be able to interpret and respond to other's reactions – a skill that is linked to children's cognitive and emotional development. David's behaviour exhibits slight immaturity (the average development of a three year old shows someone who often comforts another child who is crying and can talk about being happy or sad, for example). He needs to be able to negotiate as well as to be assertive in order to join in more appropriately. This disregard for others seems partly due to his ability to become absorbed and involved in play, which has to be seen in a positive light.

The teachers are already helping David by not focussing on his negative behaviour but by directing him to different, more constructive behaviour and he is then cooperative and interested. When asked to apologise he does so willingly. Although there are over 20 children in the class the teachers usually manage to help orient David's behaviour at the time it occurs.

Comparison of the two observations

The time sample showed how David spent his time and showed his good concentration skills. It also indicated his lack of cooperation with others and showed his assertive behaviour but was inconclusive as to the nature of the disruptions the teachers had seen him involved in. They didn't seem to be very frequent.

However the event sample showed how frequent upsets really were and indicated strongly that David's total disregard for others was a source of conflict.



References & further reading

Hobart, C. & Frankel, J. (1999) *A Practical Guide to Child Observation and Assessment*. Stanley Thornes.

Sharman, C., Cross, W. & Vennis, D. (1995) *Observing Children*. Cassell.

Beaver, M. et al. (2001) *Babies and Young Children*. *Diploma in Child Care and Education*. Nelson Thornes.

Fawcett, M. (1996) *Learning Through Child Observation*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Sequence 1 or 3 - Laura or David - Time Sample

No.	Time & setting	Others present	Actions & reactions	Language

Sequence 2 - Laura - Event Sample

No.	Time	Antecedent	Interaction	Non Verbal Communication	Speech	Concequence

Sequence 4 - David - Event sample

No.	Time	Others Present	Description of incident	Teacher Involvement	Provoked

Siren produces a range of other child development films and all follow children in everyday situations. Some are conventional films while others are specifically designed for learning observation skills and consist of valuable source material.



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